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## **BUDGET MEETING APRIL 10, 2006**

A Meeting of the Town Council was held on Monday, April 10, 2006 at 5:30 p.m. at the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato and Chairperson Morin.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien Town Manager; Dolores Sassano Town Clerk; Lisa Hancock, Finance Director; Rae Ann Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; Peter Gillespie, Town Planner; Paul Dudley, Data Services Coordinator; Nancy DiGirolamo, Tax Collector; Jan Neumuth, Assessor; Brian O'Connor; Chief Building Official; Gary Santoro, Fire Marshal; Pamela Rapacz, Registrar of Voters; Tony Martino, Engineering Analyst; and Betty Rosania, EDIC Chairperson.

Chairperson Morin welcomed everyone and announced that by Charter the Council is required to adopt the budget by May 15. He said that this will be another difficult year for the budget and said that he appreciates the work of all involved.

### **OVERVIEW**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien provided an overview of the budget stating that the budget book has been revised and simplified to provide a more user-friendly format. She said that the proposed budget is a "maintenance" budget, contains very little that is new, and still represents an undesirable 2.6 mill rate or 7.75% increase for Town and Board of Education combined. She said that the yearly tax increase on the average assessed value of \$165,867 would be \$442. The Town Manager stated that the fund balance is up and the capital reserve fund has a balance of approximately \$180,000 which is a great start. She said that a lot of infrastructure has taken place over the past few years and the budget does not include any service reductions. She said that the budget includes an increase in debt obligations since this will be one of the highest years for debt, and that she has set aside funding for future mandates including reval and radio system replacement. The Town Manager said that the Grand List has increased by \$600,000 and she'd like to see this increase even further and she has set aside funding for the actions of the Board of Assessment Appeals and the possible elimination of the municipal vehicle tax. The Town Manager said that she has stressed redevelopment in Town in order to increase the Grand List, or public services may have to be curtailed. She said that the Town needs to lobby the State Legislators in order to obtain local option taxes. She asked the Councilors to submit all budget questions to her and she will forward them to the appropriate staff to provide answers within forty-eight hours. The Town Manager said that, as part of the Strategic Plan, some of the Town Departments have been requested to adhere to zero-based budgeting.

### **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - 181, PLANNING - 182

Mr. Gillespie corrected the Table of Contents of the Proposed Budget to eliminate Zoning Board of Appeals under the Department of Planning and Development. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this will be corrected. He said that the Economic Development line item supports the functions of the Economic Development Improvement Commission (EDIC) and the Tourism Commission; and the Planning line item supports the salaries of the Town Planner, Assistant Town Planner, and hours of the Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z) clerk. Mr. Gillespie reviewed the responsibilities of, and current year highlights of economic development. He stated that the Planning

function is primarily staff assistance to P&Z, as well as to the newly formed Design Review Advisory Commission. He said that additionally the function will include the implementation of the Silas Deane Highway Plan. Mr. Gillespie stated that the requests in the Economic Development function, which were considerably more than the Town Manager supported, are primarily for the Tourism Commission. Mr. Gillespie explained that as part of the Silas Deane Highway Revitalization Plan and STEAP program, \$50,000 has been budgeted in Capital Projects as well as \$40,000 for the Façade Loan program.

Ms. Rosania explained that the \$40,000 for the Façade Loan program is very important and has been stretched and spread around Town successfully. She thanked the Town Manager and the Council for all of their support of economic development. She said that every dollar spent by the Town for economic development will be returned three fold.

Councilor Adil asked for an explanation of the line item for "Tourism - Wayfinding Signs" and Mr. Gillespie said that these signs are due to a contract between Wethersfield and the Greater Hartford Arts Council for directional signs leading to tourist destinations and the Tourism Commission has requested \$8,000 to start putting together specifications for this program. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that 60% of communities that received Federal grants have received full funding for the wayfinding signs program through the Preserve America Grant. Councilor Adil asked for an explanation of the line item for "Tourism - Consultant" and Mr. Gillespie told him that this is for the market analysis.

Councilor Cascio stated that Wethersfield has wonderful signage throughout Town with the onion on them and asked if the budget allows funding for the maintenance of these signs. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the maintenance of these signs would appear in the Physical Services budget.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked for an explanation of the difference in the amount requested and the Town Manager's amount for the Tourism ads. Mr. Gillespie explained that ads have only been run for a couple of years; therefore, it is difficult to quantify the return on this investment; however, they feel it very important to get their message out and to expand what is already being done.

Councilor Drake asked who "they" is and Mr. Gillespie answered that "they" is a partnership between the shopkeepers, the Historical Society, and the Webb-Deane Stevens who are discussing various means by which to attract visitors and also to provide visitors comment cards. Ms. Rosania explained that tourism comes out of and affects the Economic Development budget and those involved in economic development are very prudent with spending their funds.

Councilor Forrest asked for an explanation of the \$200 budgeted on line item "Reference" under Travel, Training & Dues. Mr. Gillespie said that this line item is for publications and books that may be needed for reference. Councilor Forrest asked what the \$4,500 under "Miscellaneous other copying" is for. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that this is backed out of another account and put into copying where it belongs. Mr. Gillespie said that this is for a handout with brochures providing information on interesting sites and events in Wethersfield. Councilor Forrest asked about the "Tourism Promotional Kit" and Mr. Gillespie explained that the Tourism Commission is planning to attend an event at the Convention Center entitled "Destination Connecticut" and requested funding to prepare for this. Councilor Forrest asked what the \$5,000 is for on the line item "EDIC - Marketing Media" and Mr. Gillespie explained that his department is in the process of retaining a firm to provide marketing assistance to both the EDIC and the Tourism Commission.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the interest and principal funds paid back by participants in the façade program is included in the budget. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the first awards just went out and money has yet to even be distributed. Mr. Gillespie said that interest will be coming back and the recording of this will be set up with the Town Finance Department.

Mr. Gillespie explained that his budget does not include any funding for the establishment of a redevelopment entity.

Chairperson Morin asked Mr. Gillespie for an approximate time line for such an item and Mr. Gillespie said that the consultant's conceptual plan and the cost estimates are due to the Town in one to two weeks. Chairperson Morin said that it would be best to have the process start as soon as possible and he asked the Town Manager to be prepared to inform the Council if funding needs to be added to the currently proposed budget for this item.

Councilor Forrest questioned the doubling of legal advertisement fees in the past year and a half and Mr. Gillespie stated that P&Z has been busier and has taken on some of the responsibilities formerly held by the Zoning Board of Appeals which require the advertisement of pending applications.

Councilor Cascio asked Mr. Gillespie if he is currently completely staffed and he said that he is and that he is now able to work on tasks he wasn't able to before the Assistant Town Planner was hired.

Councilor Kotkin asked about grant money being reflected in revenue and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that that is only the Preserve America Grant and has nothing to do with the STEAP grant. Councilor Kotkin asked if the amount in Mr. Gillespie's budget is offset by any grant funding and the Town Manager said that it is not.

## **GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

### REGISTRARS OF VOTERS - 050

Ms. Rapacz explained that the Department's requested amount has increased to include the costs of a primary which had to be taken from the contingency fund in previous years. She said that due to the increase in the minimum wage, the poll workers' salaries account has been increased, as well as the account for the two registrars to reflect a salary increase of \$1,200 each which is dictated by State Statute to occur every two years.

Chairperson Morin asked when the last registrar's salary increase took place and Ms. Rapacz stated that it was the fiscal year before the 2004 election.

Councilor Cascio asked if the increase in the registrar's salary will be consistent with the percentage increase in other salaries. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that it actually represents a lower percentage than other increases.

Councilor Adil asked for an update on the voting machines. Ms. Rapacz said that the Secretary of the State sent a letter to Town Managers a year or so ago stating that different machines will be used in 2006. She said that the Department of Justice has not agreed to this and negotiations continue. Councilor Adil asked how many machines will be at each polling place. Ms. Rapacz said that there will be one handicap-accessible at each polling place with as many as four machines per polling place depending on how many voters are in each district.

Councilor Kotkin confirmed that the \$16,000 salary for the two registrars (\$8,000 each) will increase to \$17,200 which is 15% and asked the Town Manager what criteria she is using when stating that this is a lower percentage than other increases. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the unions are getting approximately 3.5% increases; however she is comparing salaries rather than percentage increases.

Chairperson Morin asked how many hours per week the registrars work and was told that they normally work twelve hours per week which increases at election time.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the dues to ROVAC are required and Ms. Rapacz said that they are if the registrars are to attend the convention each year which include a day with the Secretary of State to discuss new laws. She said that the dues are not required by State Statute; however she thinks that membership is essential to registrars. Deputy Mayor Fortunato why there is a zero amount for the ROVAC conferences and was told that the line item amount for the cost of the conferences should be \$489 with the dues being \$111 for a total of \$600.

Councilor Drake asked if the line item for telephones for election polling places is new and was told by the Town Manager that it is. Ms. Rapacz explained that it is required to have a phone at each polling place and for many years cell phones were borrowed from Town staff which is difficult to request that they give them up for the entire voting day, not to mention that they didn't get reception in some buildings and the batteries would sometimes run out. She said that SNET will hard wire phones in each of the polling places which will be shut off except for the week of the election and this is the \$800 that is reflected in the "telephones" line item.

## **ZERO-BASED BUDGETING OVERVIEW**

Finance Director Lisa Hancock explained that the zero-based budgeting program used in government requires that the existence of a program or programs be justified in each year, as opposed to simply basing budgeting decisions on a previous year's funding level. She said that the process can either save money, improve services, or both. Ms. Hancock said that the staff in her Department reviewed the goals as compared to the services and programs that they provide and what it costs to provide them. She said that they then proceeded to try to determine if there were any different ways of providing these services or to even consider if there was any service that could be eliminated. Ms. Hancock said that some advantages of zero-based budgeting are that it provides restraint in budget development rather than relying on possible stale or counterproductive techniques, and that it provides for more meaningful reviews of department services. Ms. Hancock stated that zero-based budgeting requires a significant amount of time to coordinate and this could become overwhelming depending on the Department. She said that the most important thing is to make sure that the process is done correctly and that everyone is behind it.

## **DATA SERVICES - 062**

Paul Dudley stated that the zero-based budgeting program ties known expenses to core objectives or critical services in each Department. He reviewed the five items he determined for his Department to be (1) provide central computer, network and communications facilities and services to Town Departments and agencies; (2) develop and maintain information systems for Town Departments and agencies; (3) provide municipal information and services to the public; (4) assist Town Departments and agencies in effective use of information technology (5) participate in strategic technology planning.

Ms. Hancock stated that she has met with the Information and Technology Committee and a lot of the goals and objectives outlined by Mr. Dudley are being outlined in the Strategic Plan to set a baseline from which to move forward.

Councilor Drake asked if the 5% increase in salaries is consistent throughout the budget and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is due to contract agreements and the only areas this increase doesn't occur is in the Police Department and the Library. She said that some of the salary increases also include step increases.

Councilor Adil asked what benefits the Town will derive from the hiring of a Chief Information Officer (CIO). Mr. Dudley said that it will provide the ability for one person to work and focus on big issues in a sustained fashion. Councilor Adil asked Mr. Dudley if he foresees an increase in "patchwork" issues that his Department will have to deal with due to the renovation work at the Town Hall. Mr. Dudley said that there have been some issues and some uncertainties, but having the whole building freshly rewired will allow him to focus more on software issues.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that the CIO position is not currently included in the budget and that the Shared Services Committee will be making a determination on it tomorrow. She asked if the position will fall under the Data Services' budget or the Town Manager's. The Town Manager answered that it will appear in the Data Services budget because she wants to keep like things together. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked for a projected estimate of the cost of the position and was told by the Town Manager that it will be \$22,000 which is 25% of \$90,000. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Board of Education is paying for all of the benefits as well as the secretarial support.

Councilor Cascio asked Mr. Dudley if he has had the opportunity to visit other communities to see how they have structured their core facility work as it related to information systems operations. Mr. Dudley said that the Technology Committee spoke with system administrators from other municipalities about management models when gathering their findings. He said that he has had ongoing meetings with peers in other towns. Councilor Cascio asked if there is a rising community in the area that other municipalities are attempting to model at this point and Mr. Dudley stated that Manchester is a model to follow. Councilor Cascio said that it is important to make sure that the comparison of goals stays within Wethersfield's league as far as budget and taxes. Ms. Hancock said that this is a relatively new concept to government and an effort has been made to locate comparable communities doing this.

Councilor Kirsche asked for an explanation of the Town Manager cutting the \$6,210 request for IT Equipment and Software. Mr. Dudley said that the majority of the amount is for a laptop PC for GIS emergency operations and that the GIS system upgrade is for the map software. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that she cut this since CROCOG is starting to develop a regional GIS system.

### TAX COLLECTION - 063

Tax Collector Nancy DiGirolamo stated that preparing a zero-baseline budget is a very good exercise in having a baseline for a reference point and tool for setting future goals, and for serving the public more efficiently both financially and professionally. She said that since the availability of the seasonal help she has used in the past is uncertain, she has included in her budget a permanent part-time staff person to provide coverage in the office, providing the two full-time staff members more time to collect delinquencies, train on the new MUNIS system and to explore the possibility of on-line tax payments and inquiries.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien asked Ms. Hancock to provide the Council with information regarding the difference in costs for seasonal employees and for a permanent part timer. Ms. DiGirolamo said that the difference in costs from last year to this year is only approximately \$2,000. She said that her Department wants to continue with their excellent collection rate which is 99.3%.

Councilor Adil asked why the percentage difference between the Tax Department and the Assessor's benefits is so low compared to the difference between the two Department's salaries. Ms. Hancock explained that there are different levels of insurance coverage within the two Departments.

Councilor Kotkin asked how much of an insurance increase has been budgeted for. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the amount budgeted for health insurance includes active employees as well as retirees. Ms. Hancock explained that the Town is provided with an insurance calculation based on trending information and what they think the Town needs to contribute into the self-insurance fund. She said that the Town is also provided with rate amounts to be used for budget allocation. Ms. Hancock said that included in the grand total amount is a certain amount of retirees which are hard to break out; therefore the total amount is spread out amongst the Town Departments.

Councilor Drake asked why the retirement amounts aren't included in the retirement budget and Ms. Hancock said that they aren't because there is no way to break the retiree amount out of the total amount. Councilor Drake asked why the amount isn't kept as a lump sum rather than spreading it out between Departments. Ms. Hancock said that that would be easier; however, the amount is broken out in order to provide information on how much it costs to run each Department.

Councilor Kotkin asked what the increase is overall for the Town and Board of Education and Ms. Hancock said that it is approximately 8.3% which could change slightly.

Chairperson Morin stated that throwing retirees into each Department obscures the true cost to run each Department. He asked if the procedure could be changed to make this more accurate.

Councilor Drake asked if there is any value in providing the breakdown of fringe benefits by Department and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that most Towns, on the Town side, break down salaries and benefits by Department. Ms. Hancock indicated that the reason this was put into place is that the past mandated implementation for budgets was to show the true cost of each department including both revenue and expenses. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will speak to the Town's Financial Advisor about this as she doesn't want anything to happen to the bond rating due to any change.

Councilor Kotkin commented that the School budget indicates the change in health benefits, but the Town-side budget doesn't. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this doesn't show because it is not a line item; whereas the School Department is one big department. Councilor Kotkin said that he'd like to be able to see an amount indicated for the increase in health benefits for the Town-side. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is what she will discuss with the Financial Advisor.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if there is health benefit information available on the number of retirees and their dependents. Ms. Hancock said that the Town's Insurance Agent of Record has information regarding this. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if this information could be provided to the Council in an easy format. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this can be worked on; however, will not be able to be obtained overnight.

#### ASSESSOR - 064

Jan Neumuth stated that everything done in her office is mandated in the Statutes and her zero-based budget for her Department reflects this. She said that the availability of Vision Web, which is internet access to real estate data, on the Town website has been very helpful to the public. She said that the line item for Salaries and Wages is determined by contract and that the line item for Copy and Binding External has increased because a new vendor had to be found and there are very few firms who perform this service, and at a much higher cost. Ms. Neumuth explained that the line item for Dues & Subscriptions has been rolled into the next line item of Travel, Training & Dues. She explained that \$10,000 was spent this year for Personal Property Audits, and after the Board of Assessment Appeals made changes to some of the audits, the Town realized a net gain of \$68,000. The Town Manager said that she is recommending twice as much at \$20,000 for Personal Property Audits for 2006-2007.

Councilor Kotkin asked if a consultant is hired to perform the personal property audits. Ms. Neumuth said that the consultant who was hired is a previous assessor and has extensive experience in this field and works with numerous municipalities.

Councilor Kirsche asked why the \$10,000 from last year isn't appearing in the budget book and was told that last year this amount was on the line item for Revaluation Professional Services, and prior to last year, this service had not been performed for a number of years.

Councilor Kotkin asked where the budget amount for the reassessment appears and the Town Manager informed him that it is listed in the Non-Departmental section of the budget under the line item for Reserve for 2008 Property Revaluation in an attempt to spread the amount out over four years.

Councilor Fortunato asked Ms. Neumuth if she is looking at vendors from the State list of vendors for the printing services her Department requires. Ms. Neumuth said that she is not because the current vendor provides a good price and good service; however, she could look into this. Councilor Fortunato said that the State Department of Corrections provides printing services and suggested that Ms. Neumuth look into this as well as doing large mailings through the State mailing system. The Town Manager said that the Town utilizes a bulk rate when sending out large mailings.

#### CENTRAL OFFICES SERVICES - 067

Ms. Hancock explained that in addition to his responsibilities as Fire Marshal, Mr. Santoro performs duties working on the Town Hall telephone system and she has allocated payment for these services into the Central Offices Services Salaries & Wages line item. The Town Manager said that the main reason for these additional services is due to the renovation work being performed which required that he often come to the Town Hall on weekends. Ms. Hancock explained that the copy service is now combined into the Central Office Services account rather than being spread throughout all of the Town Hall Departments. She said that currently surveys and audits are being conducted on all of the copy machines within the Town and even the Board of Education in order to possibly realize savings by working with only one vendor for this service. Ms. Hancock explained that there are new federal requirements for properly posting mail which will make use of a laser process with special ink and the 2006-2007 budget for Central Office Services Postage & Delivery reflects the costs associated with moving forward with this process.

Councilor Adil asked for an explanation of the three different amounts under the Salaries & Wages line item. The Town Manager said that more than was needed was projected for 2006 and after discussing the line item with Mr. Santoro it was decided that once the renovations are complete, \$5,000 should be enough for the salary.

Mr. Santoro explained that the Telephone & Communications account is the fixed cost required to pay AT&T for a dial tone coming into the Town Hall and feeds the other Town buildings. He explained that it is more cost effective to pay AT&T a maintenance fee than to pay them \$165 for every fifteen minutes they come out for a repair. He said that the maintenance fee includes continuous monitoring of the system as well. Mr. Santoro reviewed the various other services that the Telephone & Communications account includes.

Councilor Adil asked for an explanation of the reduction in the Police Telephone Maintenance Contract line item. Mr. Santoro explained that this was consolidated into one maintenance contract to save money due to the rebundling.

Councilor Drake asked if all of the services could be packaged into one big bill and Mr. Santoro said that this can't be done since there are different locations for different services. Councilor Drake asked if it's necessary to stay with the services of AT&T and Mr. Santoro said that it is best to stay with the company used by the Police Department (AT&T) in order to prevent finger-pointing when there are problems. Councilor Drake asked if there is another way to package the services that the Town may not be aware of. Mr. Santoro said that another company did come in at one point and questioned why the Town would want to switch. Councilor Drake asked if there is any chance that the NEXTEL service will be done away with. The Town Manager said that the Board of Education has switched to Verizon for a much cheaper amount; however there is a problem because the Police and Fire Departments need to continue with NEXTEL in order to communicate with other towns. Mr. Santoro explained that Town employees can no longer communicate with the Board of Education on cell phone two-way radios since they've switched to Verizon.

Councilor Cascio asked if there is a safety issue since the Town can no longer communicate with the Board of Education. Mr. Santoro explained that it is not a safety issue since there are other means of communication; however there is an issue when required communication with maintenance personnel is involved.

#### ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS - 184

Mr. Martino explained that there is no change in the Zoning Board of Appeals budget except for the 3% contract increase for Salaries & Wages, and the rate increase for legal advertisements.

#### BUILDING INSPECTION - 530

Mr. O'Connor explained that the Salaries & Wages line item reflects the 3% contract increase. He said that he put in for three new computers, and the Town Manager approved the purchase of one. Mr. Martino stated that the rest of the budget is basically unchanged except for an additional \$200 under the line item for Travel, Training & Dues so that one of the staff members can obtain his zoning certification.

Councilor Kotkin asked what a Preventive Maintenance Inspector is, and Mr. O'Connor said that this is actually a 10-hour per week Maintenance Inspector to enforce the Town's Property Maintenance Code.

Mr. O'Connor explained that he currently has one full-time and one part-time secretary and said that the Department could certainly use two full-time secretaries, especially since the Property Maintenance Code was handed over to the Building Department from the Health Department.

Chairperson Morin asked what the cost would be and the Town Manager said that the increase with benefits would be \$41,802.64.

Mr. O'Connor said that members of his staff are mandated by Statute to attend ninety minutes of classes every three years, and although the State offers classes at no charge, there are additional classes where a fee must be paid which his staff hasn't attended in a number of years. Chairperson Morin said that he'd like to see at least the Department Head attending these classes.

#### PROBATE COURT - 095

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the budgeting for Probate Court is set by State Statute and the cost is shared between Wethersfield, Newington and Rocky Hill based on each Town's Grand List.

#### TOWN COUNCIL - 010

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the majority of the Town Council budget is for fees to outside groups, the fiscal year audit, stationary and business cards, and the annual report.

Councilor Kotkin asked why there was an increase in the line item for the audit between 2005 and 2006. The Town Manager said that the increased amount is for the Town taking on the Board of Education's share of the cost.

Councilor Adil asked if the Channel 14 allocation is used for their maintenance budget and the Town Manager said that they use the allocation as they see fit and the amount has been cut in half at their request since she became Town Manager.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked what line item would contain funding for Council members to attend events and was told by the Town Manager that this is under the line item for Council Expenses and it has been her experience that Council members are not requesting reimbursement for events that they attend; therefore the money doesn't get used.

Councilor Drake asked what benefits the Council receives for being members of CRCOG. The Town Manager said that membership includes, but is certainly not limited to lobbying, transportation funds, bus shelters, bus trail grant, and regional bidding.

#### TOWN MANAGER - 020

The Town Manager explained that the Assistant to the Town Manager's Salary comes partly from grant funding and that funding for the Civil Preparedness Director is reimbursed 50% through FEMA. She said that the Town Manager's budget includes a line item request for a Grant Locating Service which would assist the Assistant to the Town Manager in obtaining funding through grants. The Town Manager said that the \$35,000 for an Intern was cut to \$0 since this was going to be a collaborative effort with Newington and Rocky Hill and both Towns declined participation.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that she has reviewed the Randalocator Grant Locating Service and supports it believing that it will provide a pay off for the Town. She suggested that the service actually costs more than was budgeted; however she was impressed that Ms. Palmer was able to negotiate a lower fee. The Town Manager stated that the \$1,200 request for a scanner is to enable her Department to provide more information on the Town's website.

#### PERSONNEL - 024

The Town Manager explained that this budget is mostly for Professional Development and includes Tuition Reimbursement per Union contracts. She said that the line item for Recruitment is for employment ads and she explained the number of items under Support Services.

Chairperson Morin asked if the line item for Travel, Training & Dues is for all Town Staff and the Town Manager said that it is a back up for all Departments who may request funding for these items beyond what they have budgeted in their own Department.

Councilor Adil asked why the line item for Recruitment has dropped so significantly over the past two years and the Town Manager said that she isn't advertising for any new positions.

#### TOWN ATTORNEY - 030

The Town Manager explained that this budget is based on past costs for Attorney Bradley and said that the funding in the line item for Support Services is used for back taxes.

#### TOWN CLERK - 040

Ms. Sassano explained that she has one full-time union position in her office and two part-time positions, and said that her budget includes a request for one of the part-time positions to be made into full-time. She said that this would allow for time to update the Wethersfield Code Book and to work more diligently on records management for all Town Departments. She said that the Code Book has already started to be updated since there are a significant amount of changes due to Council approval of ordinances. Ms. Sassano explained that this is a massive undertaking and all Town Departments are being requested to review their portion of the Code Book to verify ordinance updates to be made. She said that her Department deals extensively with the public and has brought in revenues of over \$1 million since July 1, 2005. The Town Clerk stated that the conveyance tax collected on every property sold in Wethersfield, which is recorded and collected by her Department, is sent to the State with a portion going to the Town as well. She said that everything done in her office is mandated by the State and every Town in Connecticut is required to have a Town Clerk. She said that due to the land documents recorded by Staff in her office, there is a trail of all legal documents and titles recorded on every property in Town. Ms. Sassano said that her office provides services during elections and also functions as Clerk of the Council for information pertinent to Boards and Commissions and other things as well.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if there will be an additional part-time clerical position and was told by the Town Clerk that there is no new position; she is requesting increasing one of the part-time positions to full-time. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked what is included in the request of \$1,550 for Support Services which the Town Manager cut to \$0. Ms. Sassano said that this includes the cost of a legal abstractor who reviews the land records, and the maintenance of the software pertaining to the recording of documents.

Councilor Cascio asked where the Department's income is shown and the Town Clerk said that it is included in the Revenue section of the budget. The Town Manager explained that Ms. Hancock has provided something new in the budget this year which is to show the revenue that offsets each Department's budget. Councilor Cascio explained that if pending legislation regarding fees is approved, which it looks like it will be, there will be an increase in the Town Clerk's revenue which doesn't appear in the budget. The Town Clerk explained that as of October 1, 2005, her Department collects \$1 of each \$30 collected on land records due to the Farmland Preservation Fund requirements. She explained that a lot of record keeping and work goes into the licenses provided by her Department, and there is pending legislation to increase the Town's share of the costs for the licenses from \$1 to half of the cost of each license.

Ms. Sassano explained that even if her Department does the background work to prepare to contract out the updating of the Code Book, the two cost estimates she has received to have this done out of house run between \$16,000 and \$20,000 with most of the work already prepared. The Town Manager stated that it is very important to maintain an updated Code Book.

Councilor Drake asked if there is a grant available to fund this work. Ms. Sassano said that she's applied for a grant through the State Records Management division and her Department has historically received approximately \$12,000 for records management per year; however, she is unsure of the amount she will receive through this year's application under the Competitive Grant process. She said that she expects to hear results sometime in May, but this funding is not to be used for the updating of the Code Book.

Ms. Sassano said that she needs to add approximately \$1,500 in a line item for Overtime to allow for the full-time Assistant Town Clerk to be paid for overtime rather than taking comp time if she chooses.

Councilor Forrest asked for clarification of the overtime requirements. Ms. Sassano explained that there is a lot of overtime involved during election time, especially due to the requirements of absentee ballots.

Chairperson Morin stated that during her evaluation last October, the Town Clerk requested scholarship money to provide her the opportunity to attend a conference for further training and this request was denied. Chairperson Morin

said that he currently supports the Town Clerk attending this conference and asked if there is funding included in the Town Clerk's budget to allow for this. Ms. Sassano said that the week-long conference provides training to become a Certified Master Clerk and first-time attendees are funded by the group providing the conference; therefore the Town will not need to provide funding for the costs other than travel. Chairperson Morin said that he'd like the Town Clerk to attend the conference and would like to find funding in the budget to cover her travel expenses.

#### TREASURER - 060

Ms. Hancock explained that the change in the Salaries & Wages line reflects a requested increase in salary for the Town Treasurers. She said that an initiative being reviewed for the future is to have automatic signatures on the Town checks to alleviate the Town Treasurer's having to come in to press a button to sign the checks.

#### FINANCE - 061

Ms. Hancock outlined the Finance Department's zero-based budget recommendations to provide improvements which include the possible outsourcing of the retiree pension payment process at no expense to the Town. She said that she's also looked at the possibility of outsourcing the payroll and other processes which is appearing to not be cost effective. Ms. Hancock stated that part of the MUNIS objective is to streamline the purchasing process by reducing duplicate efforts between Town Departments. Ms. Hancock said that she'd like to see more MUNIS training for her staff so that they can properly conduct their tasks using the most efficient and up-to-date methods. Ms. Hancock reviewed her budget which includes the request for a new position of Financial Analyst. She said that her budget includes funding for the printing of the new, updated pension plan booklets for all employees and a decrease in Legal Advertising for bids due to the revised requirements of the Town Charter. She explained that the Travel, Training & Dues line item has increased due to additional MUNIS training and professional development courses.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the amount budgeted for MUNIS training includes the Board of Education and she was told by Ms. Hancock that the amount in her budget does not include the Board of Education, but is for specialized training relative to her Department.

Ms. Hancock explained that the initial year cost of the ASP service for MUNIS was included in the Capital Nonrecurring Fund; however, this is the first year that the amount appears in the General Fund budget under the line item for Support Services with 50% being charged to the Town and 50% to the Board of Education.

Councilor Drake asked for an explanation of the difference between the 2006 projected total of \$326,019 and the Town Manager's amount of \$397,413 and was told by Ms. Hancock that a big chunk of this is due to the \$58,313 MUNIS Software System.

Ms. Hancock explained that her requested new position for a Financial Analyst would help with efficiency in her office as well as to focus on how more interest income and revenues can be generated for the Town which could actually pay for part or most of the cost of the position. She said that responsibilities of this position would also be to focus on bulk purchasing for Town Departments to receive better prices, as well as cost savings initiatives of the insurance program including reimbursements from Medicare Part D, and streamlining the cash flow received from Town Departments. She asked the Council to consider this position in their deliberations.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked about Social and Youth Services Department reimbursements for the Husky insurance plan and the Town Manager said that this has already been requested since she'd like to see the Town involved; however the request was denied because Town employees did not want to divulge their social security numbers. The Town Manager said that she continues to work on this. Deputy Mayor Fortunato mentioned that there are other revenues besides the Husky program. She also addressed the grants management oversight and Ms. Hancock explained that one of the things involved with grants management is making sure that reports are filed in a timely manner and it is important that this is monitored. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked what the Town's indirect rate on grants is and was told by Ms. Hancock that there is a fringe benefit rate and Ms. Palmer stated that the Town is not using an indirect rate.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that this would be a way to help finance the requested new position.

## REVENUES

Ms. Hancock provided an overview of the Revenue Summary stating that the Property Taxes amount is what makes up the difference between all the other revenues and the total funding required by the Town. She reviewed the other revenues such as Licenses and Permits, Fines and Penalties, Interest on Investments, State Grants in lieu of Taxes, Other Federal & State Grants, Charges for Services, Other Revenues, School Revenue, Operating Transfers In, and Fund Balance.

Councilor Drake asked about the discrepancy in the property tax percentage increases and asked if the car taxes are involved. Ms. Hancock explained that the car tax is not reflected in the line item and the number provided is based on expenditures rather than the revenue side. She said that part of it has to do with delinquents which are also not as high as before and the motor vehicle supplemental effect.

Councilor Kotkin asked if she could provide worksheets to support the \$400,000 amount of Interest on Investments. Ms. Hancock said that she has them, but not with her presently. She said that she will provide this information to Councilor Kotkin.

Councilor Adil asked why the line item for Surplus Revenue Sharing went from \$0 to \$300,000 and then back to \$0 again. Ms. Hancock explained that this funding never came through from the State.

Ms. Palmer reviewed the Town of Wethersfield Schedule of Fees excluding the fees for Parks & Recreation programs since they change so frequently. She said that the Director of Parks & Recreation will address this on the night of her budget hearing. Ms. Palmer said that a committee of Town staff was formed last year to review all Town fees and compare them to surrounding Towns. She said that a number of fees were increased last year; however, some fees have already been topped out. Ms. Palmer said that some of the Building Department fees were increased; however these rates are in areas where there is not a lot of activity. She said that overall the Town fees are at the high end of the spectrum and she is proposing that some areas of the Zoning Department attach fees to items that currently do not charge a fee. In addition, it is being proposed that the Town bill insurance companies for the Fire Department's response to motor vehicle accidents.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the fee for the flu vaccinations and Ms. Palmer stated that the Health Department sets their own fees.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the Town charges for local employer fire drills to which the Wethersfield Fire Department is required to attend. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there would have to be an actual pulled alarm for the truck to show up, not just a fire drill. Ms. Palmer said that the Town does assess a fine for false alarms however. Ms. Palmer stated that the revenue projections do not include the false alarm permit fee of \$25 and notification of the ordinance will be mailed out to past offenders in the upcoming weeks, possibly with the tax bills.

Councilor Adil spoke to the concern over proper sidewalk clearing in the winter and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that Ms. Palmer is working with the Citation Hearing Board on this and three residents have recently appealed their citations due to negligence to clear snow. Ms. Palmer said that two appeals were dismissed and one was upheld.

## ADJOURNMENT

At 9:08 p.m., Councilor Forrest moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP ON APRIL 12, 2006 AT 5:30 P.M. AT THE ELEANOR BUCK WOLF NATURE CENTER**", seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk